



National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention Division of Tuberculosis Elimination

INFORMATION ON TUBERCULOSIS

Lately, tuberculosis (TB) has made a comeback. Last year there were more than 4,500 new cases of TB disease in New York State, and there are new strains of TB that are hard to treat.

Here are some common questions about TB. If you have more questions after you read this, talk to your doctor or call your local health department.

What Causes TB?

TB is caused by bacteria that usually infect the lungs, but it can affect other parts of the body, too.

What are the symptoms of TB

Symptoms of TB disease include fever, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, a persistent cough, and (sometimes) coughing up blood.

What is the test for TB?

There is a simple skin test. A positive test means that the person has been infected with TB. More tests are needed to see if a person has TB disease.

What is the difference between TB infection and TB disease?

People with TB infection test positive on their skin test for TB but they are not sick, and they cannot spread the disease to anyone else.

Only people sick with TB disease can spread it to others.

Who gets TB?

Anyone at any age can get tuberculosis. But some people are at higher risk. These include:

- people who have been around people with TB disease;
- the poor;
- the homeless;
- people from countries where there's a lot of TB;
- nursing home residents;
- inmates at correctional facilities;
- alcoholics and IV drug users;
- people with medical conditions (such as diabetes, and some cancers) that weaken their ability to fight infection;
- people with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

People with HIV are at risk for TB because their immune systems are damaged, leaving them unable to resist disease. All people at risk for TB should be tested. The test is available through doctors and local health departments.

How is tuberculosis spread?

TB is spread in the air. TB gets in the air when a person who has TB disease coughs, sneezes or speaks. Anyone who is around a person with TB disease can become infected, but usually it takes days of close contact. You can't get TB by touching things like furniture, dishes, stair railings, etc., that have been handled by someone with TB disease. And you can't get TB from a person with TB infection.

What is the treatment for TB?

Doctors can prevent a person with TB infection from getting TB disease with medication that must be taken for 6 to 12 months. People with TB disease are given at least two drugs — also for 6 to 12 months.

What is the new strain of TB?

A few patients with TB disease do not respond to normal treatment. This kind of TB is called multiple-drug-resistant TB (MDR TB). For MDR TB, doctors try several combinations of drugs. If they cannot find the right combination, the patient may die.

In summary, untreated TB can be a fatal disease, but TB is almost always treatable. Unless you are in one of the risk groups, TB probably is not a threat to you. However, if you think you are at risk or if you have any reason to be concerned, talk to your doctor or local health department.

Other TB Web Resources:

www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb/pubs/pamphlets/getthefacts_eng.htm

www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb/faqs/qa.htm

www.lungusa.org/diseases/lungtb.html

www.cpmc.columbia.edu/resources/tbcpp/abouttb.html